

Terry Hicks, father of former Guantánamo Bay prisoner David Hicks, demands freedom for Assange and Manning

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Terry Hicks, the father of former Guantánamo Bay prisoner David Hicks, issued the following endorsement of the Socialist Equality Party rally tomorrow in Sydney's Martin Place to demand the dropping of all US charges and the immediate release of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

From early 2002, Hicks campaigned tirelessly for the release of his then 26-year-old son from the US military's Guantánamo prison. David Hicks was incarcerated for over five years on trumped-up terrorism allegations. In the face of mass opposition over the treatment of the Australian citizen, the Howard Liberal-National government in 2007 made a deal with Washington to repatriate him to Australia, but only if he pled guilty to "providing material support to terrorism."

In February 2015, a US Military Commission Review Board overturned the "terrorism" conviction against David Hicks. It was further proof that the US-led "war on terror" and its associated crimes—illegal detention, torture and kangaroo courts—were based on lies. Hicks, who faces ongoing health issues, has never been compensated by the Australian government, which rubber-stamped his extraordinary rendition and illegal imprisonment in Guantánamo.

I fully support the SEP's rally in Sydney and the international campaign to secure their freedom. Our hearts must go out to Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning. We must do everything we can to take up their fight.

There's only one word to describe their persecution, and that word is barbaric. It's like the treatment imposed in medieval times, before we had any basic democratic rights. Assange and Manning are being

persecuted because they told the public the truth about the crimes being committed by the US and other governments.

We were told by US and Australian governments that the war in Iraq and Afghanistan was for democracy and it would stop Islamic terrorism. Assange and Manning provided millions of people around the world access to government documents that exposed these lies and revealed what was really going on. Without their courage and their determination we would know very little about what was really happening, not just in Iraq but in Afghanistan and other places.

Where are we heading when honest journalists who publish the truth and refuse to repeat government propaganda are treated as the enemy? Isn't that what journalists are supposed to do?

Assange warned that his persecution was an attack on all journalists and he has been proven right. This month, the Australian Federal Police raided the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, seizing emails, documents and other belongings. Who told the police to do this? Who ordered these raids? And if it wasn't the Australian government then who was it, and what right do they have to threaten journalists and media outlets? The Morrison government refuses to answer these questions.

Australians also should be asking why the government is sucking up to Trump, who is now threatening war against Iran. Do we want to be involved in an even worse military disaster with the US and what will they do to try and get everyone to support this?

Australian governments—all of them, Liberal and Labor—have washed their hands of Assange, which is what they did to my son David and to me. The

government didn't want anything to do with us and kept repeating the US lies. It was difficult, but we refused to let them get away with it, and kept on fighting.

This is how we must defend Assange and Manning. The voices of ordinary people have to be heard, and it has to be a worldwide movement. If we don't step up our efforts to win their release, all our rights are in danger and we're all going to suffer.



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